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8 April 1966

NUMBER ONE; THE BEST POSITION?

By

HARRY H. HIESTAND

Colonel, Armor



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Number One; The Best Position?

by

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US Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania
8 April 1966

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SUMMARY

This paper tests the hypothesis that the position of the leader is less complex and difficult than that of other positions in a given organization.

The comparable features of technological impact, required knowledge, identification with unit goals, internal problems, size, decentralization, communication and relative support are examined. Each of these features is contrasted in order to arrive at a conclusion concerning the comparative difficulty or complexity that each poses to the superior or the subordinate.

The thesis recognizes that personality plays a major role in this subject area. It can make the difficult easy or the complex simple; however, a "neutral" personality is adopted at the outset in order to remove this factor from consideration.

The conclusions isolate those features which form a continuing problem for the leader and stress those from which the military commander can expect support in order to ease the difficulty and complexity of his position.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In some thirty years of reading about leaders and leadership, plus exposure to considerable instruction on this subject, it has become apparent to the writer that the frustrations, difficulties and complexities of the commander are unduly emphasized. The abilities he must possess and the pressures he must withstand are often highlighted at the expense of subordinating those advantages which serve to ease the difficulty of his position. The net effect on a youthful aspirant for a command position can be one of discouragement.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the hypothesis that the position of the commander is less complex and less difficult than the positions of the subordinate members of an organization. If proven favorably, the paper will provide encouragement for those who seek the number one position. In any case it will bring out positive advantages which accrue to the leader. It is primarily directed toward those individuals who are at a stage in life where they are reaching a decision on whether to choose a career in a specialized technical field or seek one in which their success will be largely dependent upon their ability to supervise others in a series of leadership positions of progressively greater responsibility. Military personnel who are in this category should be particularly interested.

The thesis will concentrate upon analysis of those features of the leader's position which can be compared to those of other positions in the organization. It is immediately obvious that position is difficult to separate from occupant and that many side issues must go unexplored. However, insofar as possible, the paper avoids consideration of differences in incumbents and strives to point up contrasts between offices.

For the purpose of this thesis, the roles examined fall generally into the six categories shown below:

1. The top leader position is considered to be a head of state, head of an independent firm or corporation (entrepreneur), a military theater commander, or a leader of a social or religious movement. In general, a top leader is an individual who has no immediate superior or one who operates with a marked degree of independence. He is not a subordinate in the usual sense of the word.

2. The middle-manager, vice-president, chief of staff, and smaller unit commander billets form the second echelon of leader and highest level of subordinate. They have direct superiors above them and subordinate leaders below them.

3. The supervisor, foreman, squad leader, crew chief and section boss jobs are at the lowest level of leadership. They have superiors and subordinates but no subordinate commanders.

4. The follower, worker, Private, Airman, Sailor, employee, or bottom man are defined as positions whose occupants are without

responsibility for the performance of others. They have superiors and peers but no subordinates.

5. The staff member or assistant form a separate category of subordinate. This will be further described later.

6. The specialist, technician or expert are in another separate category. In most cases they are on a comparable level with the follower or the staff member (category 4 or 5); however, they may operate in a dual role such as a surgeon who heads a hospital.

This categorization of roles and status involves considerable overlap which defies sharper distinction. It is apparent that only the "top" leader and "bottom man" play an unvarying role. All those below the top leader are subordinates to some degree. All of those above the bottom man, which may include some of the staff people and some specialists play a leader role to a degree.

A brief explanation of the relevant general functions and environments of each category of leader and subordinate position appears in the next chapter. This will be followed by chapters which contrast the complexities of the roles of follower and leader, and then compare the relative difficulties encountered by the subordinate and by the boss. The dividing line between a complexity and a difficulty is not always clear. In such cases they will be arbitrarily separated. Some mention of leadership qualifications will be necessary but no comprehensive listing is intended. Size and type of

organization have a very direct bearing on the subject but these aspects will be generalized where possible. The business firm is considered to be one which produces a product for profit in contrast to the military organization which produces force applied by people, through machines against other people.

Differences in personality traits undoubtedly have a major influence on the degree of success or satisfaction with the role of leader or follower. A detailed exploration of this facet is beyond the scope of the paper. Instead, where feasible, a "neutral" personality has been ascribed to the occupants of the various positions considered.

It is recognized that a thesis is essentially a research paper, however, in some instances it will be necessary to draw upon the author's personal experience in the various levels of military command, as a staff officer and as a very basic follower. In brief, this experience has included the following:

1. As a follower: employee in such small organizations as a farm unit, a packing shed and a night club; also service as an enlisted man in two infantry regiments.

2. As a staff officer: service at battalion, regiment, division, army and Department of Army General Staff level.

3. As a commander: experience as a crew chief, platoon leader, and company commander (the latter included a tank company, a rifle company, and four tank destroyer companies.) At the next level,

command of a casual battalion, a cavalry squadron, and a tank battalion are included. In addition, the writer commanded a partisan infantry organization of several regiments (about 5000 men) during the Korean war.

This background is not cited in competition with that of the reader but as a measure of the writer's familiarity with the subject to be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

FUNCTIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

This chapter will briefly outline the functions and environment of the various categories of positions as they are relevant to later discussion. The command positions above the bottom man are treated first.

The position of leader, regardless of size or type organization is surrounded with an aura peculiarly its own. Here resides the power of decision; the center to which all information is directed; from here all guidance flows. Discipline and order are enforced in the name of the commander. Final determination of promotion and distribution of largesse properly ~~belong~~ to the person who is responsible for all that an organization accomplishes, or fails to accomplish. "...The role demands conviction and certainty...."¹ Regardless of how decisive and forceful the incumbent of a leader position may be, his authority really resides in the acceptance of his decisions by those subordinate to him.²

THE TOP LEADER

The factor of decisiveness is invariably associated with a command position; particularly that of the top leader.

¹C. G. Browne and Thomas S. Cohn, ed., The Study of Leadership, p. 239.

²Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive, p. 163.

John L. McCaffrey, as President of International Harvester said:

"...the top men operate high, wide and handsome. The decisions are theirs...."³ This power of decision over many or all matters pertaining to the organization headed by a given leader is the most important factor separating that position from all of those subordinate to it. The ability to give and to take away provides both the cutting edge and the driving force which ensures compliance with directives issued within the organization. The top leader is the one who makes the ultimate decisions as they apply to the organization. He determines the objectives of the organization. The personal goals of the top leader are more closely bound up with these organizational objectives than are the personal goals of other members of the organization.⁴

The other primary functions of the executive are to provide for communication and to obtain the means for accomplishing the organization's purpose.⁵ There is usually a range of subordinate commanders between the top leader and the bottom man.

THE INTERMEDIATE LEADER

The middle-manager's position is generally characterized by lesser authority and a narrower sphere of responsibility. He acts as a two-way relay station, transmitting instructions from above to

³John L. McCaffrey, "What Corporation Presidents Think About at Night," Fortune, Sep. 1953, p. 140.

⁴Henry H. Albers, Organized Executive Action, pp. 58-59, 261, 298, 311, 526-527.

⁵Barnard, op. cit., p. 217.

those beneath him and passing up information from below to his superiors. He makes less important decisions than do the top leaders. Depending upon the size organization, he may not even supervise the execution of the orders.⁶

This group tends to identify with their superiors and readily respond to instructions and guidance. Although helpful and sympathetic toward their subordinates they view those beneath them as representative of things they have left behind.⁷

These intermediate levels translate general objectives into particular functional, product and regional goals and develop the techniques necessary to reach these objectives. This is a part of their important task of transmitting communications.⁸

Below the top level, good leaders must also be good followers. This is particularly true within the military hierarchy where every commander has a boss. The ability to follow and obey is essential in order that a leader's command performs efficient teamwork with other organizations that are also working toward the designated overall goal.⁹

Depending upon the size and type organization involved there may be one, two, or multiple layers of intermediate managers or commanders between the top leader and the next lower echelon to be considered.

⁶McCaffrey, op. cit., p. 140.

⁷Browne and Cohn, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

⁸Albers, op. cit., pp. 336-338, 527.

⁹E. P. Hollander and Wilse B. Webb, "Leadership, Followership, and Friendship: An Analysis of Peer Nominations," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 50, 1955, p. 166.

THE SUPERVISOR

Members of this group, next to the bottom of the hierarchy, direct and supervise the activities of factory, office and other personnel. They operate within a framework of plans developed at the intermediate levels based upon the more general policy which emanates from the top. They spend more time with the workers than do the higher commanders.¹⁰

From the standpoint of communications, superiors are part of the intermediate group. They participate in forwarding information from the bottom toward the top. They also contribute to the dissemination of directives and other communications flowing from above.¹¹

THE BOTTOM MAN

The worker may be identified as one who spends energy on goals that are not strictly his own. This is called work.¹²

Being subordinate to everyone else in the organization the worker is at the end of the communication line farthest from the originating source of guiding directives. He is the source of information about what is going on at the base of the organizational structure.

¹⁰ Albers, op. cit., p. 527.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Fritz Heider, The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations, p. 292.

Unlike the entrepreneur who is intimately concerned with achievement of organization goals, the employee's incentive is in the wages or other inducements he receives for his contribution to attaining the organizational objectives.¹³

In the very formal organizations, worker identification with unit goals is more easily retained, particularly by those organizations which emphasize discipline and are required to operate on a round-the-clock basis. This applies to military units, police forces, communications networks, etc. One reason is that this type organization normally attaches much greater importance to "office" as compared to individual "man."¹⁴

THE STAFF MEMBER

The staff member or assistant usually has no personal authority. He is subordinate to his superior and like the worker, has no one subordinate to him. He assists the commander in carrying out his tasks.¹⁵ Some types of assistants are really deputy chiefs, executive assistants or assistant chiefs. These people have subordinates and are not included in this definition.¹⁶

Staff members assist by performing the detailed work not delegated to lower echelons. Staff positions usually involve a

¹³Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behaviour, p. 117.

¹⁴Barnard, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

¹⁵Ernest Dale and Lyndall F. Urwick, Staff in Organization, pp. 94-106, 137-149.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 162.

high degree of contact with seniors, as compared to supervisory jobs which involve more interaction with juniors.¹⁷

THE SPECIALIST

This separate category of subordinates is made up from those persons who by narrowing their field of research and training are able to delve more deeply into their chosen subjects. They become expert in these restricted areas. They usually limit their activities to the specialty in which they excell. As a general rule, they tend to shy away from excessive contact with others. "Deeply ingrained in the work habits of every technical employee is the desire to work on his own...."¹⁸

Experts will probably appear at the bottom man level from the standpoint of having no supervisory responsibilities. However, they may be found at many other echelons in the organization. Specialists may become assistants to help the boss by utilizing their particular talents.¹⁹ They usually will not accede to the top position, however, "Specialists are necessary, but 'they should be on tap--not on top.'"²⁰

In the following chapters these categories will be generally grouped into superior and subordinate positions. The billet of top leader will always be considered as superior. The bottom man position and usually the staff member and the specialist jobs will be in the

¹⁷Carroll L. Shartle and Ralph M. Stogdill, Studies in Naval Leadership: Methods, Results and Applications, p. 27.

¹⁸George M. Muschamp, Using Existing Technical Personnel to Better Advantage, p. 15.

¹⁹Dale and Urwick, op. cit., pp. 158-162.

²⁰Henry H. Farquhar, "The Anomaly of Functional Authority at the Top," Advanced Management, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April-June, 1942), p. 51, as quoted in Henry H. Albers Organized Executive Action, p. 111.

subordinate class. The offices of intermediate leader and supervisor fall into a group that is superior or subordinate depending upon the context of the comparison being drawn.

CHAPTER 3

COMPLEXITY VS SIMPLICITY

This chapter is devoted to contrasting features of the superior--subordinate positions which are comparable from the standpoint of complexity vs simplicity.

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE

Regarding what the leader must know, Dr. J. M. Duran says:

There are two bodies of know-how needed by any executive. One is the technical knowledge of apparatus, processes and the like. The other is the skills and tools of management.... How do you get action?... get people to work together? ...The transferable part of any managerial job is getting results out of people.... A man who is accustomed to running a watch factory can take over a locomotive factory successfully if he has...the skills of management.... This sort of adaptability is even more pronounced at the very top.... They are much more concerned with the overall relations of people....¹

Other management experts will disagree, to some extent, with this hypothesis. Dr. Earnest Dale indicates that "know-how" in the job is basic. In his view, managerial ability is less important, although he also stipulates that a pure "engineering" slant will not work because it fails to take into account the people involved.²

¹M. J. Dooher, ed., Making the Most of Your Human Resources, p. 67.

²Ibid., p. 68.

Apparently some knowledge of the business is absolutely essential. Research in this subject reflects disagreement in the "degree" of technical excellence necessary for the boss.

A study of a military organization revealed that those officers who had some technical knowledge of the specialty being supervised thought that this capability gained them better respect from their subordinates. Other officers, in the same organization, who lacked technical knowledge of the work they supervised, thought their void in this area to be advantageous since it kept them from interfering in the work being processed. This study did not reach any conclusions regarding the relative effectiveness of either type supervision but it did specifically state that the opinion of the latter group was not discredited by present research.³

Personal experience along this line reflects the desirability for some degree of expertise in the procedures or techniques of the production that the boss is controlling and supervising. It provides him with more confidence if he is personally competent in the technique. However, it is not an absolute essential. This experience showed that the greater burden was placed upon managerial ability. In addition, the attitude expressed by the experts in the organization was that it forced them to prepare papers in less technical terms. This in turn resulted in readier acceptance when the reports reached the highest decision making level.⁴

³Ralph M. Stogdill, et al., "A Factorial Study of Administrative Behavior," Persomel Psychology, Inc., Vol. 8, 1955, p. 179.

⁴The author, although lacking any significant technical background, served an assignment as chief of the Scientific and Technical division of a major agency of the Department of Defense. The comment stems from that experience.

The subordinate who is hired upon the basis of his qualification to perform a specific function must obviously be able to demonstrate the necessary skill in order to keep the job. If he has the knowledge and can display it skillfully, success becomes a simple matter. If the requirements are above his level of attainment, he must either receive further training or be replaced. In the latter instance, the complexity of the task has placed the job completely beyond his scope.

What should be the ratio of technical training between superior and subordinate? Ralph Linton says:

The employer does not need to know the techniques involved in the employee's labor, and the employee does not need to know the techniques for marketing or accounting.⁵

Perhaps the leader is really a "specialist in leadership." He need not possess extensive technical knowledge in order to carry out the duties of his role. It is more important that he acquire essential leadership skills. He can transfer these managerial abilities from one type of top position to a similar role in another type organization. The well known fact that many persons of proven managerial ability sit as directors on the boards of diverse corporations further substantiates this point.

TECHNOLOGY

We see today the rapidly accelerating advance of the physical sciences and technology. We are also faced by our expanded

⁵Ralph Linton, The Study of Man, p. 114.

knowledge of sociology and psychology, the complexities of big government, and our improved communication media. The latter brings us knowledge of special problems from all parts of the globe. Thus, our world is becoming more intricate each day.

This situation forces the leader into contemplation of the influence that growing technology will have on his organization and his plans for the future. It will undoubtedly make his task more intricate. This is countered to some extent by the assistance he can gain from it. It will help him by providing more information and by extending the range of his personal supervision. He can also obtain a wealth of information from computerized reports and better means of communication.

On the other hand, improved transportation and communication capabilities will probably increase the scope of activity which he must supervise. The additional information he obtains will permit him to reach better decisions. However, each additional item of information merits additional consideration, thereby slowing the decision making process and delaying the eventual result.

For the subordinate, technology has the impact of possibly eliminating his job through application of automation. He may be required to learn a new skill or in some other way be required to modify his previous activities. In general, it appears that by reason of technology the boss becomes better acquainted with a subordinate's activities. A frequently heard statement is that,

"the helicopter has removed the privacy from the battlefield." Daily news reports indicate that the President of the United States receives almost instantaneous reports on the progress of a given military action in Vietnam, on the other side of the world.⁶

On balance, it appears that the advent of technology will complicate rather than simplify the subordinate's position. For the leader, the impact of technology serves to both complicate and simplify his position with a slight edge favoring the latter.

THE SPECIALIST

...We sit at our desks all day while around us whiz and gyrate a vast number of special activities, some of which we only dimly understand. And for each of these activities there is a specialist.... All of them are no doubt good to have. All seem to be necessary. All are useful on frequent occasions. But it has reached the point where the greatest task of the President is to understand enough of all of these specialities so that when a problem comes up he can assign the right team of experts to work on it....

Inherent to expanded technology is the advent of the specialist. These experts can be of great assistance to the boss in his confrontation with a world of growing complexity. It is

⁶Tom Wicker, "President Asserts Nation Still Opposes Widening the War," New York Times, 8 Feb. 1965, p. 1; Charles Mohr, "Limit on Conflict Stressed by US," New York Times, 12 Feb. 1965, p. 1.

obvious that no one man can hope to be expert in every activity which may impinge upon the duties of his position.

After hiring the specialist, the boss must, in order to effectively employ this tool, understand the capabilities and limitations of his expert. He has been obtained to operate a complicated machine or to answer questions which require extensive knowledge in a narrow field. This means that the boss is not in a position to criticize the manner in which the expert performs his specialty. This limits the leader's scale of supervision.

The leader must also weigh the relative validity of the expert advice he receives. If he is furnished with conflicting advice from two or more experts this becomes a very complicated judgment problem. There may be occasions when it is necessary for the boss to proceed in a manner contrary to the course indicated by the specialist. Repeated instances of this nature may damage the expert's morale and impede his effectiveness.⁸ On the other hand, a specialist may not care whether or not his advice is accepted. It is often the case that:

He is so fully engaged in arranging his own ideas that he becomes aware of what is going on around him only imperfectly and reluctantly. His special training means that his broad training has been neglected.⁹

This narrow viewpoint is a feature the boss must understand while he is listening to advice from his experts. This can be considered a part of the leader's job of understanding people.

⁸Muschamp, op. cit., p. 15.
⁹Sampson, op. cit., p. 29.

From the subordinate's standpoint, the role of specialist is a simple one. Whether operating an intricate device or rendering a learned opinion, the specialist is operating in a field where his only competition is from others who are expert in the same subject. Unless overtaken by technological advances he can usually find a ready market for his services. This gives him a degree of independence in his relations with superiors. By restricting his attention to a narrow field he can concentrate his energies and maintain or improve his skill level. As his skill improves his economic mobility also increases.

The specialist's disadvantages lie in his narrow scope which will probably constrain his advance to responsible leadership positions. At this point the factors of personality and individual preferences enter the picture. As pointed out earlier, the specialist's interests do not normally extend in this direction.¹⁰ Therefore it would be a rare specialist who found himself at such a disadvantage.

In this area, the position of the subordinate appears to be less complicated than that of the superior.

THE STAFF

Staffs are designed to narrow the range of choice provided to the decision maker.¹¹ This effort centers upon the occupant of the

¹⁰supra, p. 11.

¹¹Kent R. Greenfield, ed., Command Decisions, pp. 4-5.

number one position.¹² By proper use of his staff, the commander can free himself from preoccupation with small details and concentrate upon the few simple essentials which are important to success.¹³

A commander may subvert the use of his staff by delving into minor details or by pre-empting his staff's task of supervising a particular activity. He may also be misinformed by his staff, either deliberately or otherwise. The staff may contain members who substitute their views for the chief's or prevent him from talking to persons that he should see.¹⁴ These are individual problems that a wise executive will detect and eliminate.

By reason of his close association with the boss, the staff member is somewhat sheltered as compared to a subordinate commander who is also working for the same superior. The staff member is usually responsible for his individual actions only, while the subordinate leader is normally held responsible for the actions of every member within his command.

From another viewpoint, the staff position is often complex, particularly in military organizations. This is because the staff assistant is usually junior in grade when compared to commanders of subordinate elements beneath that headquarters. The assistant must display extreme tact, excellent judgment and show a high degree of technical skill in the directives he issues in the name of the

¹²Barnard, op. cit., pp. 178-179.

¹³Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, Military Leadership, pp. 9-23.

¹⁴Dale and Urwick, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

commander. He must please the boss and in addition he may, in a future assignment, find himself working for one of those subordinate commanders to whom he issued instructions!

The assistant is in the position of having to perform the detailed work while the boss has only to approve or disapprove the paper presented to him.

In all matters, the boss has the advantage of the initiative. The assistant responds as best he can. He works on what the boss considers important, which may not coincide with his own views. In the absence of the boss he makes decisions in accordance with the boss's policy as he understands it. He is thus frequently confronted with the situation of considering a course of action from two points of view; first the decision he would personally make, and secondly, "how would the boss handle it?" This process can be rather complex for the assistant.

The assistant does **not** bear the weight of responsibility carried by the boss but the requirement to constantly react to the authority of his superior makes his life more complicated.

SIZE

The size of an organization will undoubtedly affect the complexity of the positions of its members.

The more people the boss must supervise, the less intimate his relationship with each one. This reduces his personal daily

influence on their actions. If he believes that "familiarity breeds contempt" he may relish his remoteness from the masses. By interposing layers of subordinate echelons he places himself farther from the basic employee. In this manner, increased size complicates the position of the superior because he knows less about the employee's activities and because of the increased number of people involved.

The larger the organization, the more matters the boss must consider, unless he resorts to a pattern of decentralization. Such an organizational device adds to the number of communication centers.¹⁵ This puts the boss in the business of managing the managers. He becomes primarily preoccupied with coordination.¹⁶ He then has less time for organizational goals and long range planning unless he can, through his staff, free himself from the detailed concern with internal administrative problems. Decentralization adds to the layering of an organization and provides a real challenge to the subordinate who wants to get an idea up to the number one position. A suggestion submitted through normal channels may never reach the top. If it does, the proposal may be totally unrecognizable when it reaches its destination. Furthermore, it may be improperly presented, and thus fail to gain acceptance. "Nothing is so damping and deadening to initiative as to have a carefully thought out scheme vetoed by a central authority which knows almost nothing about it...."¹⁷

¹⁵Albers, op. cit., pp. 143-145.

¹⁶Dale and Urwick, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁷Bertrand Russell, Authority and the Individual, p. 61.

Just as the boss's subordinates increase in a growing organization, a subordinate's superiors likewise increase in number. In a small unit the follower is exposed to the unilateral whims of a single leader, but he can soon adapt to such a superior. With more bosses he can expect to receive more frequent changes and some conflict in his instructions. This can be a source of continuing complication for the subordinate. From the standpoint of simplification neither leader nor follower appear to be especially favored by an increase in organization size.

A few of these same factors will necessarily reappear in the next chapter which deals with the relative difficulty or ease of the various positions.

CHAPTER 4

DIFFICULTY VS EASE

Some features of the commander and subordinate positions are comparable from the standpoint of relative ease or difficulty. The first of these appears below.

GOAL IDENTIFICATION

The higher up the management scale, the more closely the individual identifies with the company goals.¹ This keeps the top man's personal inclinations more closely oriented with his occupational objectives, thereby easing the difficulty of his position.

As the distance between top and bottom increases the boss knows less about what the worker is thinking and the bottom man understands less about overall goals and what is desired of him. Robert C. Sampson says:

- ...Research evidence cannot be denied.
It shows that:
1. Management and employee interests are different.
 2. Interest of employees is limited to their immediate jobs, their own work units, their fellow workers and their supervisors.
 3. Employees can have no understanding or personal concern for abstractions about the company, such as profits, financial figures, company plans and the like....²

¹Albers, op. cit., pp. 527-528.

²Robert C. Sampson, The Staff Role in Management, p. 20.

The wage earner who does not share in the business restricts his concern to the problem of continuing his employment. A marked division between personal and occupational interests can be considered a difficulty for the employee. This lack of employee association with unit objectives creates a motivational difficulty for the boss. He must put extra effort into showing the employees how they will personally benefit from company success. Improvement in the orientation of their views will enhance their motivation and enhance their motivation and ease the boss's task.³

Some employees have a spark of initiative and wish to gain greater acceptance, admiration and respect. They would like to join in attaining company objectives. Under conditions of tight supervision and little responsibility, any move in this direction is stifled.⁴ Many would like to help their foreman in making decisions because they think they have something worthwhile to contribute which will enhance the overall efficiency of the shop.⁵ As a general rule, individual initiative is easy to stifle and difficult to arouse. Closer goal identification eases the position of the commander and increased awareness of unit objectives throughout the organization will further ease his task.

DIFFICULTIES OF DECENTRALIZATION

A policy of decentralization is easy to announce, however, many bosses find it difficult to relinquish any degree of authority to

³Philip Hull, Stimulating Employee Proprietor-Mindedness: One Company's Approach, pp. 28-31.

⁴Milton Hall, Staff Development; The Supervisors Job, p. 14.

⁵Eugene Jacobson, Foreman and Steward, p. 94.

subordinate echelons. They are afraid of possible slip-ups or serious failures. This generates similar fears below them. Each subordinate commander jealously clings to such shreds of authority as the boss is willing to delegate. In this type environment the employee, soldier, sailor, or airman at the end of the line, lives in an atmosphere of constant harassment caused by the fears of his immediate boss. If the top leader really wants to decentralize, the further down the line he can push authority and responsibility the more efficient he will be.⁶ In an environment of true decentralization, involving considerable delegation of authority, some measure of this responsibility for considering overall problems and making decisions within spheres of responsibility reaches down to the supervisor. The worker is usually sensitive to the problems of his immediate superior. In this manner he acquires a greater awareness of the over-all goals of the organization.

Of interest to military readers is a study of Naval leadership which produced this finding: "In formally stratified organizations,... morale and organizational integration are better maintained when seniors provide juniors with freedom for decision and action...."⁷

The above listed factors support the contention that a well executed policy of decentralization will ease the job of the superior and to some extent that of the follower.

⁶Muschamp, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷Shartle and Stogdill, op. cit., p. 32.

COMMUNICATION

"Men can always cooperate better if they understand the reasons for any prescribed course of action."⁸ General Bruce C. Clarke, an extremely successful US Army commander, constantly emphasized to his subordinate leaders that in order "to get what you want, you must tell your people what it is you want." This appears almost too obvious to mention. However research, personal experience as one of his subordinate commanders, and personal observation of other military unit commanders clearly indicates (to the author) a tendency of leaders to expect their subordinates to understand unit objectives through some mysterious process of osmosis. Some of the boss's more difficult tasks are those of properly constructing messages and getting them to the right people on a timely basis.

Good communication helps the leader to unify the efforts of all personnel and direct them toward achieving the organization's goal. Modern-day charismatic political leaders such as Castro, DeGaulle and Nasser have grasped the benefits of technology by maximizing the use of television and radio to unify support for their programs.

As mentioned earlier, the intermediate leaders are important communication links for both upward and downward transmissions. This two-way flow of information involves the process of abstraction.

⁸Dale and Urwick, op. cit., p. 66.

On the way up, more and more details are eliminated as the report passes through successive layers. The reverse is true as the word goes down the line. All communication is subject to some distortion. Details considered important by the foreman may be eliminated by a middle-manager. Some of the omitted information may be important to the top executive when he receives an abridged report. This can be offset by the boss getting out and visiting in the lower environs of his organization.⁹

The men at the ends of the communication line, who are the last to get the messages, are the ones most concerned. Thus communication is a difficulty for both the top and bottom men. The difficulty is intensified as the organization grows in size. Occasionally a subordinate fails to realize that the boss needs the information that he has not forwarded.¹⁰ A slip-up along the way can mean that the boss failed to receive word in time to make a necessary decision, or the subordinate was not informed of a requirement to take necessary action. Both parties originate messages. However, the boss is responsible that they are transmitted properly; it is therefore concluded that the greater difficulty lies with him.

INTERNAL PROBLEMS

The leader often finds that much of his time must be devoted to resolving personal differences between subordinates or in seeking

⁹ Albers, op. cit., pp. 363-364; Carl F. Braun, Management and Leadership, pp. 67-70.

¹⁰ Simon, op. cit., p. 163.

solutions to perplexing personal problems of individuals in the organization. He may have to contend with informal groups that seek power in an organization (cliques). Feuding cliques within an organization will normally cause a deterioration of unit efficiency.¹¹

The inexperienced boss will have difficulty discerning the difference between vocal, loyal supporters and fawning sycophants. Separating the sincere from the insincere is always a problem for every leader.

Somewhere in his career almost every superior must face the problem of the ambitious subordinate who may decide that he has something to gain by deliberately misinforming the boss. Of course this is a gamble for the subordinate. If detected, this can result in seriously blighting his career. Subordinates may conceal things from the boss; they may try to sway him or control him for a self-seeking purpose. Probably one of the most difficult subordinates that the boss must put up with is the one who tells him what that subordinate thinks the boss wants to hear, as opposed to what he should be told. This one can be a delightful fellow. He never has any bad news, is always agreeable and often combines this talent with that of being a good listener. If, however, he is the boss's chief source of information, that boss is not going to be aware of potential trouble in time to take corrective action.

¹¹Ibid., p. 161.

The boss will have many other internal problems such as those relating to coordination, organization, production, etc. However, these are not as comparable to those of the subordinate as are the ones cited above.

The subordinate has his own problems. These are competition from his peers, concern with pleasing his superior(s), matters of pay and privilege, his working conditions and other environmental subjects.

Inasmuch as the subordinate has no responsibility for settling personal problems of others nor for production or other major concerns of the boss, his degree of difficulty in this area is far less than that of the boss.

SUPPORT

To surmount the difficulties of his position the leader is provided with massive support; some portions are obvious, other elements of support are intangible.

The leader position is the one from which all decisions emanate. These decisions form organization policy and serve as guidelines toward attainment of ultimate goals. The leader is also expected to define or change these goals. Even if the power of reward or punishment is omitted from consideration, this goal setting capability is one which greatly enhances the leader position.¹²

¹²Albers, op. cit., pp. 526-527.

The degree of discipline within an organization also affects the strength of the top position. In military formations, a certain unity of doctrine or procedure cements the entire organization together with a common spirit.¹³ This feeling of unity adds to the built-in support for the command position at the apex of the formation. Since the leader personifies the organization's unity, and since the members are taught the virtue of unity, any attack upon the leader by an external force will be resented by others within the group. By the same token, a success of the leader, award or promotion, is a matter of gratification and pride for subordinate members. In either instance, external attack or significant success, the feeling of organizational unity is enhanced and the leader's support is strengthened. On the other hand, attacks upon the leader that originate within the organization tend to destroy unity, diminish the leader's status and weaken his support.

As a general rule, most people prefer maintenance of the status quo to the unknown dangers of change. Since all organized groups have a leader position of some type, the incumbent serves to personify a feeling of continuity and with it, security. The top position is always there, regardless of other changes. It remains normal for support to be given the position, irrespective

¹³James D. Mooney, The Principles of Organization, pp. 128-129.

of the occupant.¹⁴ George C. Homans comments on the flow of activity which centers on the leader:

...The leader is the man people come to; the scheme of interaction focuses on him. At the same time, his high rank carries with it the implied right to assume control of the group, and the exercise of control itself helps maintain the leader's prestige. This control he is peculiarly well equipped to wield by reason of his position at the top of the pyramid of interaction. He is better informed than other men, and he has more channels for the issuing of orders.¹⁵

Even if he isn't privy to information not known to others, the fact that they think he is establishes his position of primacy.

An important feature mentioned by Homans is that of the focus of interaction on the leader position. This is associated with habit. A child learns to go to a parent for decisions. In later life he turns to a business, religious, political or military leader for necessary decisions. The more frequent the interaction, the deeper the channels of communication are grooved. The superior to subordinate relationship is more firmly fixed by this activity. "Power is an inter-personal situation; these who hold power are empowered. They depend upon and continue only so long as there is a continuing stream of empowering responses...."¹⁶ This habitual deference to the leader position helps engender an almost automatic support whenever the situation indicates such a need.

Finally there is a desire to protect the leader. If he is safe, healthy and strong he can be expected to produce wiser

¹⁴Barnard, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁵Homans, op. cit., p. 188.

¹⁶Harold D. Lasswell, Power and Personality, p. 10.

guidance and the entire unit benefits--and the dangers of a break in continuity of leadership are reduced.

The hopes and aspirations of most subordinates are embodied in the leader. Each follower feels that he has a share in what the leader represents. This tendency to identify with the commander provides one of the many intangible pillars of support for the number one position.

The power of the top position is generated by the occupant's right and duty to make decisions.¹⁷ The enforcement of these decisions is based upon the willingness of subordinates to obey.¹⁸

The recalcitrant subordinate may not choose to obey. He may provide "lip service" and appear to conform while actually performing at a level well below his potential. In this manner he avoids the penalties associated with outright insubordination. He retains his means of livelihood and at the same time may even gain an inner satisfaction from his unobtrusive sabotage effort.

The subordinate's position is supported by his performance of duty over a period of time. In a manner of speaking, his position is enhanced by the degree and duration of loyal support he provides to the leader. Loyalty works in both directions, upward and downward. The leader's position is enhanced by his demonstrated loyalty toward his subordinates. It is obvious that a strong interrelationship

¹⁷ Ralph M. Stogdill, "Leadership, Membership, and Organization," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 47, No. 1, Jan. 1950, pp. 8-9; Ralph Linton, The Study of Man, p. 113.

¹⁸ supra, p.6.

exists in this "support" area. However, it is certainly one feature of the leader's position in which he should encounter less difficulty than the subordinate.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Compared to other posts in an organization, the position of the boss is complicated by the multiplication of specialties and the necessity to handle the attendant horde of experts. In another respect, the advance of technology tends to favor the top position. Through proper use of specialists the boss can overcome a deficiency in technical skill necessary for the management of his organization.

Changes in unit size will tend to complicate the number one position; however, application of the techniques of decentralization and proper utilization of his staff help the boss to overcome this problem. Continuous and effective communication with all members of the organization is often difficult but provides a very important advantage to the leader..

Inherent to the number one position is the occupant's close identification with organizational goals. This permits him the advantage of possessing the initiative. The staff member, specialist or any other subordinate must necessarily devote most of his efforts in responding to the directives of the leader who determines or modifies the ultimate unit objectives.

An inescapable difficulty of the superior's position is that of dealing with internal problems which center around personnel, individually or in groups. Regardless of the size or type

organization, the top man is the one to whom people look for the solution of their problems. This is a manifestation of their acceptance of his leadership.


Finally, a vastly important advantage of the number one position is the matter of support rendered by the various factors which make up the leader's environment. This feature of the leader's position is eloquently summarized in the following statement of Sir Winston Churchill's reaction to assuming the role of Prime Minister of Great Britain during the early dark hours of World War II:

In any sphere of action there can be no comparison between the positions of number one and number two, three, or four. The duties and the problems of all persons other than number one are quite different and in many ways more difficult. It is always a misfortune when number two or three has to initiate a dominant plan or policy. He has to consider not only the merits of the policy, but the mind of his chief; not only what to advise, but what it is proper for him in his station to advise; not only what to do, but how to get it agreed, and how to get it done. Moreover, number two or three will have to reckon with numbers four, five, and six, or maybe some bright outsider, number twenty. Ambition, not so much for vulgar ends, but for fame, glints in every mind. There are always several points of view which may be right, and many which are plausible.... At the top there are great simplifications. An accepted leader has only to be sure of what it is best to do, or at least to have made up his mind about it. The loyalties which centre upon number one are enormous. If he trips, he must be sustained. If he makes mistakes they must be covered. If he sleeps, he must not be wantonly disturbed.

If he is no good, he must be poleaxed. But this last extreme process cannot be carried out every day....¹

The individual reader must necessarily draw his own conclusions regarding the relative advantages, complexities of difficulties of the various roles he may choose to play. Matters of personality, ambition or personal preference will undoubtedly influence each finding. The factors that were considered cannot be given equal weight. They were selected on the basis of relative comparability.

In view of the nature and purpose of military organizations these conclusions are considered to be especially applicable to military personnel. The features of goal determination, employment of technology, communications, and the use of specialists, staff and other personnel provide the military commander with the ability to control his environment and direct this force. His control of these features, plus his retention of the initiative, coupled with the massive support which flows to him, make up the decisive components of the leader's billet and lead to the conclusion that the number one position is best of all.


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